

OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS
CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY, AND STANDARDS
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Markup of H.R. 3598, the Manufacturing Technology Competitiveness Act of 2004
Thursday, March 25, 2004
1:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Good Afternoon and welcome to today's markup of H.R. 3598, the
Manufacturing Technology Competitiveness Act.

Manufacturing is a significant contributor of wealth to our economy, a source of high-paying jobs, and a major supporter of industrial research and development in this country. We count on our industry's ability to create new jobs by leading the world in scientific developments. While there are many challenges facing our nation's manufacturers, I believe the fundamental issue of innovation has been generally left out of the debate. For decades, innovation has underpinned American's dominance in the world economy. If our manufacturing sector is to remain competitive in the global marketplace, we must foster innovation within this sector.

While our economy is rebounding, we know the manufacturing sector continues to struggle. In response to the challenges faced by manufacturing, the subcommittee held a hearing last May to learn from experts in the field about the role of research and development in manufacturing competitiveness. The witnesses expressed deep concern that the preeminence of U.S. manufacturing in the global economy was eroding through the loss of manufacturing overseas. They described how the U.S. needs to accelerate its pace of innovation to ensure domestic job-creation and to maintain our technological edge, especially in critical industries. The witnesses said that some small Federal programs already contribute to this area, but that more needs to be done.

The legislation we are considering today, H.R. 3598, will provide a structure for better coordination between Federal manufacturing R&D programs; strengthen the Manufacturing Extension Partnership program, better known as MEP; establish a collaborative grants program at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to support innovation; and create a fellowship program at NIST to cultivate greater U.S. expertise in the manufacturing sciences. Together these initiatives will have a positive impact on the competitiveness of U.S. manufacturing by spurring the growth of new industries and thus creating jobs.

This bill has bipartisan support, and I want to thank Mr. Udall for all his efforts. The bill is also supported by several groups, including the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Coalition for Advanced Manufacturing.

I will be offering a manager's amendment that makes some technical corrections to the bill as introduced. It also removes language establishing an Undersecretary of Commerce for Manufacturing and Technology because the Administration has created the new position of Assistant Secretary for Manufacturing and Services.

This is an important and timely bill. Our global competitors are eagerly supporting investments in manufacturing research and development because they know it is the key to sustained economic development. If we are to continue to be the world's technological leader, we need to rise to this new global challenge and make the investments envisioned by this legislation. I urge my colleagues to support it today and as it moves through the Committee.